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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001294

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [ASEC](#) [AMGT](#) [CMGT](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: CHARGE MEETS WITH RANGOON MILITARY COMMANDER

REF: A. RANGOON 1266

- [1](#)B. RANGOON 1263
- [1](#)C. RANGOON 1143
- [1](#)D. RANGOON 1140

Classified By: Charge Shari Villarosa, reason 1.4 (b), (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: Charge met with Burma's Chief of Military Affairs Security and Rangoon Military Commander Lt. Gen. Myint Swe on November 9 to discuss security issues affecting the U.S. Embassy. Charge outlined specific ways in which security could be improved around our Embassy, noting that the most effective measure would be closing the street entirely. The General committed to work with the Embassy to make adjustments to increase security, including supporting twice monthly meetings between Embassy officers and relevant Burmese officers. As evidence of his follow-up, the Embassy was informed the morning of November 10 that Embassy personnel could use wooden barriers to close the road in front of the Embassy at night from 2300 to 0430. He also discussed upcoming plans to move the capital to Pyinmana and indicated his willingness to discuss other non-security issues. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (C) After exchanging pleasantries, Charge outlined additional measures that needed to be taken to improve security in front of the Embassy: improved lighting across the street from the Embassy, prohibition of large trucks, traffic controls (lights and police) to prevent the stoppage of traffic in front of the Embassy, regular meetings between Embassy officers and relevant Burmese police and military officers to discuss security matters relating to the Embassy, and improved radio communications. She also reserved the right for U.S. Embassy personnel to scan pedestrians walking past the Embassy and the right to close the road immediately with our own barriers if we received an imminent threat warning. She noted that opening the road made the Embassy very vulnerable to car/truck bomb attacks, and the best security measure would be to close the street entirely.

[1](#)3. (C) Gen. Myint Swe replied that he understood our concerns and added, "the terrorists are also attacking us. We don't accept terrorist attacking others on our soil - we won't let it happen." The General repeated claims we had heard from the Foreign Ministry (reftels) that the street had to be opened due to public complaints about the inconvenience of this closure of one block. In fact, he added that the public complains frequently about too much security in the city and around the railroad station. Nevertheless, he said "on security, we will not compromise or reduce our efforts. We always give your security our full attention and use full measures. As Commander of Yangon Command, I won't allow anything to happen."

[1](#)4. (C) He then reminded us that this is a police state saying, "we have covered all of the six main roads coming into the city -- we check everything at these six entry points. Yes, it may be possible for small explosive devices - someone may sneak them through, but big ones, it is not possible. The truck bombs that happen in other countries, we won't let that happen here. You may not always see it, but there is lots of security in your area--police, army and others." Pointing out that his office is close to the Embassy, he said that he has personally checked the area around our Embassy on numerous occasions, both in uniform and out of uniform. "I have walked all through your area." He said he had just instructed the Ministry of Home Affairs to reinforce security on the back of the U.S. Embassy. Since Burmese security officials checked people "from a radius far-out from around the embassy," he told Charge that the U.S. Embassy did not need to check them again as they walk past. He also said that the GOB was using a list of suspected terrorists from 16 countries received from the U.S. Embassy to screen people entering the country.

[1](#)5. (C) Charge mentioned her previous service in Indonesia had heightened her security awareness. She pointed out the improvised explosive devices can be made of common ingredients that might not be noticed at checkpoints. The General relied that "we notice terrorist actions in other

countries, and we study this as Army officers because it's a professional responsibility to look at it from every angle." The Charge repeated the suggestion of regular meetings between U.S. Embassy officers and relevant Burmese to address security issues. The General agreed that twice monthly meetings would be welcome. In addition, he said that Embassy officers had the telephone numbers to contact his office at any time.

16. (C) The General said that primary responsibility for Embassy security rests with the Minister of Home Affairs, Major General Maung Oo, "but I oversee him, so his responsibility is my responsibility. Yesterday and this morning I met with him and told him to add more guards. Have you met with MG Maung Oo?" Charge replied that she had requested a meeting several weeks ago, but had not yet been given an appointment. The General replied "He is responsible to me. I will have him meet with you."

Pyinmana

17. (C) Changing topics, the Charge inquired what the move of the capital to Pyinmana would mean for General Myint Swe as Rangoon Commander. He replied that the Minister and Ministry of Home Affairs will move, but all the security and police would remain in Rangoon. He said he would move to Pyinmana as the Military Affairs Security Commander. A new Rangoon Commander would be appointed (he did not specify when, but implied soon), and he would instruct the new Commander to meet with the Charge. In the meantime, he would stay in Rangoon wearing his two hats.

Conclusion

18. (C) As the meeting concluded, the General mentioned again that he always passes by the U.S. Embassy on his way to work. Charge invited him to come in to "have an exchange of views--not just about security." The General said he would maintain regular contact with Charge "not just on security, but anything else that you need help with."

Comment

19. (C) Embassy DATT arranged the meeting and accompanied Charge. The Chief of the OCMAS Foreign Liaison Division and another FLD staff officer sat in the meeting on the Burmese side, along with an interpreter and a notetaker. DATT is an excellent notetaker, so we could provide an extensive readout of Gen. Myint Swe's comments to give readers a sense of the atmospherics. Contrary to the messengers on Embassy security with whom we dealt in the Foreign Ministry, we finally reached a decision-maker in Gen. Myint Swe. Apart from sticking to the principle that the road should be opened, the General seemed favorably inclined towards additional measures that could improve our security. In contrast, other diplomats in town have failed to get any further attention to their security needs since the sudden reduction of security presence around all diplomatic missions on October 8 (refs C and D).

110. (C) General Myint Swe, believed to be a protégé of SPDC Chairman Than Shwe, made quite clear that the military has supreme authority, including over the cabinet increasingly populated by generals. This is a police state, and he intends to keep it that way. However, we may have an opening now to the senior leadership to direct our concerns regarding the continued detention of Nobel Laureate Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners, as well as to press for the full participation of all the people and political parties in determining Burma's political future.

VILLAROSA